

## "The Lamb of God Goes Willingly"

Luke 13:31-35

### I. The Third Day

Your antennas should be twitching when the Pharisees are trying to help. They come to Jesus with a look of deep concern and tell him, "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You." "Herod wants to kill You," they warn; but they leave out the rest of the sentence, which should go something like this: "Oh, and by the way, we want to kill You, too." True, there's one or two Pharisees who trust in Jesus, but they are the steep minority. The rest want Him gone as much as Herod. This Herod is one of the son's of Herod the Great—his name is Antipas and as far as rulers go, he doesn't fall far from the family tree. Herod the Great was undeniably jealous for his throne, and would tolerate no possible competition—same with Antipas, so he wants Jesus gone. The Pharisees understand that Jesus poses a threat to their doctrine and authority. They'll plot to kill Him if they have to, but nobody wants a martyr. So, it would be quite helpful if He just knocked off the teachings and miracles, and went away somewhere; that way they could make sure that He was forgotten—after they discredited Him, of course.

As far as Herod and the Pharisees (strange bedfellows, to be sure) are concerned, it's far better that Jesus flee and never return.

But Jesus will not be diverted from His plan, and He's willing to say so: "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.' Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem." So begins His response to the Pharisees.

His words must sound a bit mad to their ears because they are so paradoxical. On the one hand, Jesus tells them He will cast out demons, cure illness, and then be perfected on the third day. But at the same time, He tells them that He will journey to Jerusalem today, tomorrow and the day after—in order to die. He'll perish, He says: Not just at the hands of Herod or the Pharisees; no, the entire city of Jerusalem will be calling for His death, as they have done to so many prophets before.

So, which will it be? Will Jesus cure or perish, win or lose? Will He be perfected or crucified? Will the crowds cry out, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord," or "Let His blood be upon us and our children"? His two statements just don't go together. Do they?

With hindsight, you know. Jesus is not outlining two possible paths. All of this is going to happen. He is going to journey to Jerusalem, casting out demons and curing illness along the way. That journey will go on today, tomorrow and a few days after that—but not many, for His time is drawing near. When He gets to Jerusalem, He'll enter the city triumphantly on a donkey as the crowds wave palms and cry out, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" Yet, a few days later, crowds will cry out, "Let His blood be upon us and our children!" and demand His crucifixion. All will seem lost when He dies on the cross—but then comes the third day. When Jesus speaks of the third day in Luke, He doesn't mean the day after tomorrow. He means the Day of Resurrection, Easter Sunday. That is when He is perfected, so to speak, for that is when it is proven that He has perfectly fulfilled God's will for your salvation.

So with this text, Jesus is not suggesting possibilities. He is telling them exactly what is going to happen when He goes to Jerusalem. He is going, and there's no stopping Him. Remember,

the account of His teaching in His hometown: The crowd tried to throw Him off a cliff, but He walked right through their midst (Luke 4:28-30). No one could lay a finger on Him against His will.

Thus, as He goes to the cross, no one can keep Him away from His appointed task---not Herod and all of his soldiers nor the Pharisees with all of their plans. This is the Son of God going about His Father's will, and He will not be diverted from the journey. He is going to Jerusalem. And because He is going to Jerusalem, the Pharisees will work out the details for His death. If He isn't going to go away, they will make Him go away.

But bear this in mind: They don't make Him go away. The Lord is still in charge. He does not die on that cross because of the plottings of the Pharisees. Nor is He scourged and crucified because of the power of the Romans. He goes to that cross only because He goes willingly, because this is His plan for your salvation. This is the all-powerful Son of God, and He will not be denied your redemption.

This is your comfort and hope: Your Savior is not a weak man who is overpowered by evil. No matter the hatred of His enemies, He goes to Jerusalem. No matter the plots and plans of man, nothing keeps Him from suffering the full judgment for your sin.

## II. The Lamb Who Goes Willingly, and a Note on the Third Day

And so we say again: Jesus goes to the cross and dies only because He wills to. This may seem an obvious truth, but it is one that must be defended. You see, many are willing to concede that Christ was crucified-as long as they don't have to admit that it was He who was in control.

Many scholars have suggested that Jesus is a tragic figure: He's a life-changing teacher who could have had a lasting effect on the world; but, unfortunately, He was put to death before He could make a difference. It makes for a sympathetic, heart-rending story, but it seeks to rob you of hope. Lots of good men and women have been so treated and martyred, but they were not redeemers. If Jesus is just a brilliant teacher whose life is cut short against His will, then He is not the Son of God who has died in your place. He is not the Savior who is risen and will raise you. No matter how sincerely these arguments are made, they are only doubt and unbelief. Jesus is not a visionary whose life is tragically, unexpectedly cut short. He is the Son of God in human flesh who willingly goes to the cross to be the perfect sacrifice for your sin, at the time of His Father's choosing.

No, it is not the power of Herod or the Pharisees that crucifies Him. To be sure, all the false charges and the weakness of Pilate were the instruments used to put Jesus on the cross. These were sinful, despicable acts to be sure, but God used the sinful acts of men to accomplish His divine purpose. So we can say that It is not the power of Pilate and the Roman guard or the sinful corrupt testimony of the Pharisees that hung Him there. We also add this: You didn't crucify Him, either.

It is popular to say such a thing as "All of us sinners put Him on the cross," but let us be careful as to what we mean. It is correct to use this statement in a way that declares the sinfulness of all mankind: Truth: It was not just the Jews or the Romans who killed Him, but Christ was crucified for the sins of the world. However, be careful about what this statement may also teach when you say, "We crucified Jesus." Your sin did not **compel** Jesus to be conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. Your sin did not **send** Him to the Jordan to be baptized, nor did it **drive** Him into the wilderness to be tempted. And your sin certainly didn't crucify Him; what I mean is, your sin didn't **force** Him onto the cross.

He did it willingly. He submitted to the suffering and the nails and the death because He willed to do so for you.

It may seem strange to contradict that common statement that **we crucified the Lord**, but consider the following implications if it is true.

If your sin put Him on the cross, then your salvation is partly depended on your works of sin! (Don't laugh. There are folks out there who trumpet the importance of sin because, without it, we couldn't have a Savior.)

But more important than that is a more common misunderstanding of the cross. The Gospel is the Good News that Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins; that's the simple way we put it to our little children. The purpose of the Gospel is to comfort us with forgiveness. On the other hand, the purpose of the Law is to accuse us of our sin, to show us our guilt.

Let me expand a little on that—suppose you upon the cross and say, "His death shows me my sinfulness." This means that the Lord's death makes you feel guilty—it accuses you. This means that you have now turned the Gospel into Law, and this has the potential for a couple of serious outcomes. First, if the cross accuses you, then it's quite likely that you don't want to hear about the cross; thus you don't want to hear about what happened on Good Friday (the Gospel) anymore. And if you no longer hear comfort from the cross and the Gospel, there is no more comfort to be found. Furthermore, it is not inconceivable that you will then make another logical step: "Every time I need forgiveness, I make His death necessary. Therefore, being a Christian is all about sinning less and asking forgiveness less so that I don't make His death so necessary." There are a lot of churches out there that avoid speaking about the cross because they don't want to make people uncomfortable but focusing on the cross.

So, it's not quite right to say, "Jesus had to die because of my sin" —

Let me give you an example that might help to see this clearly. Suppose you own a piece of machinery which you lovingly built or made for a certain purpose. Now suppose the machine breaks down. Does its breaking **compel** you to fix it? No. It might require you to make a decision. What are your choices? Repair it. Abandon it as it. That's the choice God faced when sin entered His perfect creation. And His choice, because of His love for His creation was to fix it. He wasn't compelled to ---he chose to. His plan for fixing it involved His Son paying the penalty for mankind's rebellion. His plan involved His Only Son taking on human flesh—keeping His commands perfectly—and then trading that perfection for all our sins. That was His plan. So to look at Christ's body on the cross and say my sin compelled God to do this is not quite right. No, it's far better to look upon the cross and say "This is how much God loves me". He didn't die there because He was forced to. It was God's plan that His Son would die in your place so that you might be with Him. He died for you. Don't let the cross drive you to despair--it is the greatest sign that God loves you.

So, whether you see a movie about the Passion or sing those rich and somber hymns of Lent, remember this distinction of Law and Gospel. Use the Law of God to examine yourself, and there you will see your sin and how much you deserve its wages. There is quite enough there to accuse you. But when you look at the Lord's death, do not let yourself be accused with the notion that, "My sins put Him there." Instead, be comforted with the Good News: "My sins didn't put Him there. Nothing forced Him there. He went willingly for me—for my salvation. And that is why my salvation is sure."

He went willingly. Because of His love for you.

Along with refuting that notion, we must refute one more: The devil didn't put Him there, either. Every now and then, I'll have a conversation that is similar to a cartoon I saw on the internet. This one had the scene of Jesus and the devil in conversation; according to the context, the devil had ownership of sinful mankind, and Jesus was offering to buy them back. The devil consented, if Jesus was willing to pay all of His tears and all of His blood as ransom-to the devil!

This is simply wretched theology, though it is often passed off as Christian doctrine. For one thing, since when did Jesus start listening to the devil and start consenting to his demands? This certainly isn't the way that the Temptation went in the wilderness. For another, the devil didn't want Jesus to atone for the sins of the world-in fact, while the devil wanted Jesus gone, the last thing he wanted was for Jesus to sacrifice Himself and redeem us in the process. Furthermore, Jesus didn't shed His blood to pay off Satan; that blood was an offering to Christ's Father in heaven, the blood of the perfect Sacrifice for our sins. If the blood of Christ was used to pay off the devil, then it doesn't cover you before God. (And if the Lord's blood is the devil's payoff, then what sort of gift is Jesus giving you in His holy Supper?)

Nowhere in Scripture do we find the Lord paying a ransom to the devil for your redemption. At the cross, He makes that sacrifice to His Father; and by that sacrifice, He does not appease Satan-He guts and crushes him forever.

Again, if the devil gets credit for the crucifixion of Jesus, we are robbing Christ of His glory. The Good News is not that He was executed against His will. The Good News is that the cross was Jesus' will, because it was His Father's will; and so the Lamb of God went uncomplaining forth to bear the sin of all sinners. Remember His prayer in the garden of the gethsemane---Father, not my will, but Thy will be done. He went willingly and died your death so that He could give you His life. This is why the cross is Good News, why it is the Gospel: Jesus died willingly, and He died willingly for you.

Before closing this sermon, we note one more thing so that we might proclaim more Good News. As we have already stated, Herod and the Pharisees and the Romans could not keep Jesus from going to Jerusalem; and likewise, it was not Herod and the Pharisees and the Romans who put Him on the cross and kept Him there. But though it wasn't them, it sure looked like it was. For all appearances on Good Friday, the One who looked to be the least in control was the Son of God, Jesus Christ. This appearance continued for the long silence of the Sabbath. It only on the third day that His victory became apparent.

As Christians, we wait for a day-the Day of His return, one that I pray will be soon. But as we wait, what sustains us as we await that day? The knowledge and faith that Christ has died. Christ is risen. And Christ is coming again.

You currently live between the "Christ is risen" and the "Christ is coming again." And in this mean time, the world is full of false teachers who seek to persuade you that Christ is not risen and will certainly not come again. With popularity and followings, they seem to be quite in control. At the same time, you must endure affliction in the form of sickness, grief, heartache and loss-all of which seem to indicate that the One who is least in control, once again, is the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And you.

So behold your Savior in this Gospel lesson. No matter the power of Herod or the cunning of the Pharisees, the Lord keeps His Word and goes to the cross. No matter the suffering and

bloodshed and death, He rises again three days later-just as He promised. The Lord has kept His Word up to this point, and nothing will stop Him now.

Plenty of people will preach and argue that Christ will never return. Who are they to stop Him? No one. He will return.

Afflictions will seek to convince you that the Lord will not deliver you. But what power do they have over the Son of God? None at all.

Dear hearers in Christ, be comforted. We do not know the day or the hour of the Lord's return. But He will return, for so He has promised.

And His return is good news for you, because His death on the cross is Good News for you. For risen again, He does not cease willingly to declare that you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen